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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PRISTINA 000669

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KCRM](#) [EAID](#) [KDEM](#) [UNMIK](#) [KV](#)

SUBJECT: KOSOVO: DEMINING REPORT RECOMMENDS MORE CLEARANCE
AND EDUCATION, HIGHLIGHTS RISK OF NEWLY-ABANDONED LANDMINES
MINES AND UXOS

REF: 2006 PRISTINA 923

Classified By: COM TINA KAIDANOW FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) published a report in July 2007 on landmine and unexploded ordnance (UXO) contamination in Kosovo and the local capacity to address it. The report, the result of a February GICHD mission to Kosovo to review progress on addressing the landmine and UXO threat and evaluate a HALO Trust report on suspected dangerous areas, concludes that contamination may be greater than earlier anticipated, but that it is not a constraint on development and sustainable livelihoods. The report also calls for the continuation of clearance and mine risk education (MRE) efforts and highlights the need to reduce private stockpiles of munitions to prevent accidents from newly-abandoned landmines and UXOs, which Kosovars often leave in fields and parking lots throughout Kosovo. END SUMMARY.

GICHD's Mission to Kosovo

12. (C) A Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) assessment team visited Kosovo in February 2007 at the invitation of the Office of the Kosovo Protection Corps Coordinator (OKPCC) to: 1) follow-up on their July and August 2006 assessment mission, and 2) review HALO Trust's December 2006 report entitled "Failing the Kosovars." The 2006 assessment mission, which was largely the result of questions HALO raised about the extent of landmine and unexploded ordnance (UXO) contamination in Kosovo and the capacity of the OKPCC EOD Management Section and Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC) EOD teams, revealed some information management problems, including missing and incomplete task dossiers. (NOTE: There was an acrimonious dispute between HALO and the OKPCC during ex-KPC Coordinator General Christopher Steirn's tenure. At the lowest point, HALO Trust Director Guy Willoughby sent a letter to General Steirn in November 2006 attacking his credibility. Relations between the two organizations remain tense, and HALO has ignored OKPCC's order for them to leave Kosovo. END NOTE.) However, GICHD experts said they did not believe those problems had

resulted in substantially underestimating contaminated areas.

Consequently, GICHD concluded that OKPCC EOD Management Section and the KPC EOD teams had sufficient capacity to handle the residual threat from landmines and UXO, but made some recommendations for improvement. Most of the recommendations related to improvement of information management, additional research, re-survey of sites for which documentation was incomplete, and improvement of mechanisms for the public to report potential contamination problems.

GICHD's follow-up mission uncovers no significant unknown problems

¶3. (SBU) In February 2007, GICHD reviewed OKPCC Explosive Ordnance (EOD) Management Section's progress on the recommendations for improvement and looked at the task dossiers they had not examined in 2006. They found that OKPCC EOD Management Section had promptly addressed all of the recommendations related to threats directly affecting the population and had completed or made significant progress on most of the other recommendations. The task dossier review revealed more missing and incomplete information, and GICHD said some areas would require re-surveying as a result. Nevertheless, GICHD said it did not uncover evidence of significant unknown problems.

¶4. (SBU) During their assessment mission, GICHD also reviewed "Failing the Kosovars" and met with HALO representatives. GICHD was not surprised that HALO's proactive survey had uncovered additional areas of concern, but was surprised by the scale of the problem HALO reported. HALO says it uncovered an additional 58 tasks; OKPCC EOD Management's 2006 year-end estimate was 36 remaining tasks.

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While the GICHD assessment team was unable to determine the accuracy of HALO's estimate since the areas in question will require further investigation, they pointed out that general surveys sometimes result in estimates "that overstate the problem, often by enormous amounts." They also noted that OKPCC and Mine Awareness Trust (MAT) surveyors that visited the majority of the sites in "Failing the Kosovars" found some sites that would require clearance, but also found some suspicious information and some reports that were the result of locals who were fearful due to ignorance about the clearance that had taken place.

Landmines and UXOs abandoned after the war pose threats

¶5. (SBU) GICHD listed a variety of reasons for the potential discovery of additional dangerous areas, the most disturbing of which is that numerous landmines and UXOs have been abandoned in Kosovo since the war. According to GICHD, individuals and militias have stockpiled munitions -- including both unused mines and those "lifted" from implanted minefields -- because they believe the security situation is tenuous. When they hear about KFOR collection efforts, some choose to abandon dangerous items rather than risk KFOR seizure and possible criminal charges. GICHD's claims are consistent with OKPCC EOD Management Section reports of finding newly-abandoned munitions in fields and parking lots due to people who have grown nervous about keeping the munitions in their homes, but fear that reporting them to authorities might prompt seizure of other illegal weapons they want to keep for self-defense. USOP sees evidence of this every day in UNMIK Police situation reports. For example, on August 10, a Kosovo Serb reported an unexploded device on his property in the Suvi Do area of North Mitrovica. Police responded and discovered it was a 60 mm projectile for a rocket launcher; upon closer inspection of the area, they found a total of 17 similar projectiles. The next day, the UNMIK Police situation report mentioned that police found a rocket launcher in the same area. KPS Spokesperson Veton Elshani told poloff off-the-record that the rocket launcher and projectiles did not pre-date the war.

¶6. (SBU) GICHD also cited a number of less alarming reasons for not being surprised that the contaminated areas in Kosovo might be larger than previously anticipated. They said some minefields were never recorded and are not discovered until someone sees a mine or an accident occurs. They also reported that cluster bomb strike records are inaccurate and that actual sites may not be confirmed until local residents see cluster bombs. Finally, Kosovo's terrain is rugged and some contaminated areas may be in isolated areas that have not yet been discovered. GICHD predicts that as the road system improves and communities' "economic footprints" expand, people will find previously unknown areas contaminated with landmines and UXOs.

GICHD's Recommendations

¶7. (SBU) GICHD's report reaffirms that landmines and UXO are not a constraint on development and sustainable livelihoods in Kosovo and says KPC EOD teams can handle the residual threat by either extending the duration of their demining program or further expanding their capacity. It also recommends continuing mine risk education (MRE) and clearance efforts, as well as reducing Kosovars' stockpiles of munitions to prevent accidents from newly-abandoned landmines and UXO.

¶8. (C) Comment: While GICHD's report focuses on the degree of contamination from landmines and UXOs and clearance efforts and capabilities, it highlights the very important issue of the threat from newly-abandoned landmines and UXOs and reminds us of the need for ongoing MRE. Post will continue to search for ways to help the Kosovars address these problems. Thanks to a PM/WRA grant, KPC EOD teams are currently benefiting from the help of dogs borrowed from the

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Mine Detection Dog Center (MDDC) in Bosnia that can reach remote areas that deminers have difficulty surveying. The dogs recently worked on a site near Kacanik that HALO Trust had identified as potentially contaminated; they discovered that it was mine-free. USOP and PM/WRA are also working with a local NGO and the International Trust Fund (ITF) in Slovenia on a possible MRE program to reach schoolchildren in affected areas in western Kosovo. End Comment.
KAIDANOW